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## The 'Keep the heid' newsletter! September 2020

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### Who are the Making a Difference group?

North Ayrshire's Making A Difference (MAD) service user involvement group, provides a positive platform for our members to become included in the development and delivery of Justice Services. Service users can have their voices heard, continue to learn new skills, increase their confidence and become involved in the on-going development of activities. We had previously been working on a magazine to be published two or three times a year however the COVID-19 pandemic came along and brought that somewhat to a halt. So we decided a virtual newsletter might be a good way to get our news out to everyone for a wee while! One of our members once said that the important part of making recovery work during lockdown was "keeping the heid" so we decided to call our newsletter that.

The pandemic has presented Justice Services with several barriers to supporting service users on lockdown. As a service, we have been forced to think 'outside the box' and adapt our approach to lockdown restrictions. These restrictions exacerbate existing issues that service users experience, such as isolation, mental health problems, substance misuse and accessing services.

### Our Approach

Our MAD members told us that they found the fact that we were not going to be able to publish our magazine due to the lockdown restrictions quite demotivating. Therefore we spoke about using our Making a Difference twitter page (@MADGroupNAC) as a method of 'distributing' a lockdown edition of our magazine. Our members loved this idea and got to work furnishing us with the sort of information we wanted to be sharing with our followers. This included:

- Sharing some hints and tips on recovery during lockdown every day for a week
- Being aware of national campaigns such as Mental Health Awareness Week and using this as a platform to promote the impact that recovery and addiction can have on mental health (below is an example of one of our Twitter posts)



I check my emails and texts in case any of my recovery family need help or anything and after that I'll check in with my close friends, the one or two that I feel closest to. If they're all fine, good. Otherwise I'll do what I can to help out - from sending little keepsakes to books to anything really. Most of them live alone and don't have close family so contact is important just to let them know people are still here and still care about them. Losing hope is as easy as being bored but far more dangerous especially in recovery.



- Sharing views from their daily walks and exercise with our followers
- Developing and compiling an activity book to send out to isolated and lonely service users in the community. This booklet had various activities in it, guidance for mindfulness and also some relevant helpline or services if they were to find themselves struggling during lockdown

- Sharing the acts of kindness our MAD members have carried out during lockdown or had shown towards them
- And finally one of our most popular activities was the cooking challenges. Packs of measured out ingredients and recipes were dropped off to each of our members and they were to cook various meals. These were then voted on by followers on social media



We asked our members to elaborate on how the lockdown activities have helped and they confirmed that learning new skills, doing something practical and having a safe space to share experiences has been beneficial. Overall, it appears that having something ‘fun’ to do also allowed members to cope with some of the negative aspects of lockdown, such as boredom, isolation and a lack of connection.

*“[It’s] given me the help to be able to cope with the lockdown”*

*“They are helping me greatly, I enjoy cooking, so this cooking challenge/fun is amazing”*

*“When u spend all ur time lookin after family it’s nice to just chill out n do something fun knowing that there are others doing the exact same thing”*

*“That’s awesome. Those riddles were brilliant. Love the mindfulness parts and relaxation ones too. Thanks for sharing this with me.”*

*“My favourite was the relax guide thing. It really calmed me.”*

*“It literally took up a whole day then I shared it with my mum.”*

*“We had a family quiz with it – [the] kids loved it”*

### Paul’s story

One of our MAD group members shared his experience of lockdown and recovery...

*“Hello, ma name’s Paul and ah’m an addict... proud and grateful tae say a recovering addict who has been since the ar\*e end ay 2018. It’s been some gig man! It still is! Ma life’s amazing today, things are good and as long as ah do the things ah have learned and found that work for me, ah’m good as well.*

*Ah’m so fortunate, I’m placed wae the Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) in South Ayrshire, doin my social care SVQ and I’ve got a cracking volunteer role wae the MAD project. I’ve been doin what ah do since more or less ah came out ay treatment last year... ah love it and it is something ah am genuinely passionate about. Ah dae Narcotics Anonymous (NA) as well... I love the fellowship and it does a lot for me.*

*COVID’s been a nightmare, it’s the first I’ve been stuck at home wae just ma head since May last year. Unfortunately over the course of lockdown ah relapsed. At the end ay February ah had a wee blip but had got on top ay it straight away but it highlighted stuff ah hadn’t addressed and a was still puffing the odd bit of green. Lockdown happened ah was going through stuff and before ah knew it, ah had a heroin habit again... and for a few months ah was using against ma own will.. it was horrible. Ah became dead disconnected so quickly, it was frightening man. Ah had isolated myself and ah was sacred to tell anyone ah had relapsed. I was frightened of losing ma place in the ADP team and whit a dae with MAD being took away fae me. I was ashamed that ah let people down... it was silly really.*

*Ah got tae the point where ah put my hand up and asked for the help and everybody has been amazing. I’ve had nothin but help, love, kindness and reinforcement fae Faye and the team at the ADP. They have been amazin with me, ah’m so grateful fae that lot in my life, they’re ma people. The guys fae work are the same, Stephen and Big Ritchie were gonna put ma door in if I didn’t answer!!*

*It’s the same story wae MAD and the guys in New Street (Justice Services social work in North Ayrshire). Love, kindness, encouragement and support. Rachael (MAD staff member) has been a rock and a real champion for me. She does a lot for MAD off her own back and she has done the same*

*for me. When my relapse happened and I fell off the radar, Rachael came out to my house to check on me and make sure ah was okay. Then kept in touch with me once a week to make sure I was still good. I have a good working relationship wae Rachael – she’s a good influence and cares about people.*

*That’s how much people care about me and ah don’t think a woulda made it out through that relapse without them. Ah need tae put the work in and dae stuff every day tae stay well and work to stay connected and honest wae the people around me. When ah dae that, life’s good and magic. I’m looking forward tae COVID being over and getting back into what ah was doing before. I’m not glad that ah relapsed but ah’m grateful for the experience as ah’ve took a lot of learning fae it.*

*The biggest bit ay learning?*

*Stay honest and when I’m stressin a bit or even just a bit down, pick the phone up and somebody’ll talk tae me, help me and no judge me. That’s important... oh aye and just don’t use! Lol. That’s how ah got my recovery back and that’s how I’ll keep it. Grateful tae talk tae yae and grateful for ma recovery.*

*Thanks for reading!”*

## Reflections

When lockdown was announced it would have been easy to simply cancel our activities and consider beginning everything again when restrictions were lifted. However this could have meant potentially losing a group of members who were motivated and benefitted greatly from their involvement in the MAD group. Thankfully we recognised with a bit of creative thinking we could still engage with our members and provide them with support and activities throughout this challenging time. We found that virtual platforms were key. We learned that we could develop activities that members could work on and provide us with their progress and feedback using these platforms as a means of evaluating their success. While we had anxieties around putting pressure on members, we in fact found out that this was beneficial to our members, as they were often experiencing episodes of boredom and ‘bumps in the road’ with their recovery. So while the COVID-19 virus changes how the world looks, we’ll change how we work!

## Last but not least...

We wanted to share one of our cooking challenge recipes with you in each of our newsletters. This month we’ve chosen our ‘MAD Lockdown Classic Biscuit’ custard creams.

### Ingredients for the biscuits

170 grams of butter  
55 grams of icing sugar  
170 grams of self-raising flour  
55 grams of custard powder

### Ingredients for the filling

75 grams of butter  
150 grams icing sugar  
Strawberry jam (optional)



### Method

1. Preheat oven to 180 degrees and line two baking trays with greaseproof paper
2. Cream your butter and icing sugar together and then gradually add the flour and custard powder to form a paste
3. Divide the mixture into small balls (should make approx. 16) and squash each ball down with a fork
4. Bake for 12-14 minutes
5. Then prepare the filling by mixing the butter and icing sugar in a bowl
6. Let the biscuits cool and then spread half with the filling and a little spoonful of jam (optional) and then sandwich together with the other half
7. Enjoy with a cup of tea or coffee!